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destroy the crops of a village in a week. Shouting is not sufficient to scare them off when there are many. When the small baboon families held off by the boys threaten to grow into a troop, farmers use their rifles.

Hare ("tēnchāl") is also called the "enemy of tieff" because it likes to feed on that main crop of the farmer. It is a nocturnal animal, perhaps because of its natural enemies, the ever-present birds of prey.

- Yellow Sparrow ("mānakusit"), lit. "little monk", because its yellow coloring resembles the saffron toga formerly worn by monks.

[192]

Flax snake ("yātalba ebāb") is of the light-brown color of flax-seed, on which it likes to feed. It is also called "kurfafeya", because when disturbed, it makes a sound like "fuff". Its bite is considered mildly poisonous by the Amhara but requiring the services of a native "wogāsha" (surgeon), who thus acquires a reputation for his "cure" against this actually non-poisonous snake.

[825]

Locust (ambāta), occurs less often than the other dangers, but when it comes, in huge swarms of a 3-inch species, the results are devastating, causing major famines. (The usual route of the locust is arrival from the lowland eastern border, through the Great Rift valley (Awash), up the plateau, in January, just after the main harvest. It withdraws to the dry lowlands for egg-

793 also performs masses on specific occasions, including memorials and holy days, chants part of the liturgy, reads (but usually does not know how to translate) biblical portions from both New and Old Testament in the Geez language. Before performing the eucharist, the officiating priest is expected to abstain from sexual intercourse for 1 to 3 days, for this is regarded as polluting him (an Old Testament survival). Before such occasions he takes care to sleep on the mudbench of his hut, rather than on his "alga" bed. This procedure is followed Saturday night, before a baby's baptism, before giving ritual ablution to the dying, etc. He is also expected to wash his body before giving the eucharist (but in the dry season this is often overlooked).

A learned priest, more scholarly than the parish administrator or guardian of his flock, is given the special title "māmher" (roughly, "professor"). He is usually an expert on the hymn book "degwa", and is employed in teaching it to upper grades in church school.

793 When he becomes a monk, he is often appointed to "abbatachen" (lit. our father), abbot of a monastery, where his mild disposition enables him to keep the peace among hotheaded, ambitious monks, some of whom regard monasticism as a career. If the "mamher" continues to advance his knowledge of church literature and history and legends (e.g. the life of the saints), he receives the title "liq". He is usually one of the few Amhara who really know and understand Geez well, including the subtle shades of meaning of the many diverse grammatical forms;

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370 raising the bewitched, and which seems to have an effect similar to benzedrine.

Examinations include fluency in reading Ge'ez and in reciting by heart Gospels, Lives of Saints, and Ethics ("sirāk"), the last particularly in the upper grades. In still higher grades they learn devotional poetry ("qenē"), including composition, and "ṣāna", church liturgical music in correct tones and notes.

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372 For more advanced study, the boys interested in a career in the church have to go to monastery schools. At the old and famous Amhara monastery of Dabra Libanos the number of students may reach 500 at any given time. They earn their keep by serving the monks, begging in the vicinity, and eating as much as they can when a noble family arrives to give a memorial feast, "tāzkar", in honor of a departed soul. Often the students do not possess a good shamma, and therefore have adopted the ancient clothing of sheepskins over their rags, to keep themselves warm and to be identified more easily when they go begging. Begging, they carry a small basket on the left arm and, leaning on a maqomya stick with the right, chant ecstatic church melodies until the housewives fill the baskets with enjara or parched barley ("qolo").

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Those who serve the monks, carrying water, washing their clothes, carrying their food, water, etc., receive part of the monk's daily ration ("derro"). The students usually graduate by age 18 to 20, and then decide whether to take monastic vows or return home to

874 sophy, "mäsehar" (lit. book), interpretation of Old and New Testament, and writings of Coptic Church Fathers on the subject. Also studied are the "Käbrä Näcäät" (epic of the "Solomonic Dynasty") and the "Fetha Näcäät", law code.

Examinations are held orally, usually on the saint's day of the institution, which thereupon becomes graduation day. The oral degrees given are termed, "qenē", "zēma", "mäsehar", according to the individual's specialization, much as Western colleges grant Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, etc. degrees. Receipt of the degree is regarded only as a commencement in scholarship, for a real "mäsehar" requires 20 to 40 years of study, to complete all these branches of religious education, in view of the Amhara themselves.

872 Since little girls receive no formal education,
562 they cannot be taught nearly as much as boys, when, later in life, females aspire to become active nuns in nunneries. At most they are taught Geez prayer, with difficulty and by rote, and do not go beyond what is taught little boys at the local parish schools.

792 Monks usually reside in landowning monasteries, except for former priest who have taken monastic vows and return to their parishes. Monasteries are headed by the "abbatachen" (lit. our father), whose official co-administrator is called "Säbate". In personality he is usually dominant and commanding, unlike the mild, other-worldly abbatachen; though on occasion the same person can hold both positions. Each large monastery has a

● 792 council of elder monks

If a nunnery is attached to the monastery (e.g. by common ownership of land), they are separated by riverbeds, steep hill, etc., and have their own pasturage meadows, and their own chapels.

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465 The staple foods are beans and peas, consumed in large quantities, usually boiled as "nefro" (the staple hot dish of fasting periods), and a specially thick, nutritious bread, "dabbye". The latter is at least 1-1/2 feet in diameter, at least half an inch thick. It is cut into quarters, and each monk receives a specified number of quarters according to his monastic rank. Thus, older, high-level monks who need less food have much surplus with which to engage the services of church students, or even trade with peasants for occasional chickens, honey, spices, etc. The range is from a mere one-quarter for the lowliest monk to 12 quarters for the head of the monastery, plus proportional distribution of "nefro".

Barley-beer is also similarly rationed out, on permitted occasions. Cotton cloth (abujedid) and shamma or netala togas are distributed once a year, preferably in time for the masqal holyday.

792 The chanting of prayers and poetry permeates the atmosphere, from 3 A.M. when the monk supervisor of the day enters the kitchen, humming the pre-dawn chants, to long after nightfall when students still practice for exams.

792 Nunneries are similarly organized, headed by an abess, but the average age is much higher, since becoming a nun is far less a career than becoming a monk, and typically chosen by women who have been unhappy in marriage or have been widowed. Virgin nuns are extremely rare.

There are also laywomen who serve as volunteers and for the occasional spiritual and temporal benefits that result from association with a large nunnery-monastery, which still represents a major business organization, trading post, produce and commodities exchange, etc. "Gabbar" sharecrop tenants supply cereals, services, etc.

[292] The baking is done largely by nuns and laywomen, who also cook and brew barley beer, and milk cows. The last is particularly essential on non-fast periods when milk consumption is permitted. Monastic rules are so severe, that no female animals are permitted inside the monk's area; no cows, mares, bitches, etc. This is the literalness with which the separation of the sexes is enforced!

Finally, there is a non-functional clergy, a relatively small number of hermits. They usually live under cave-ledges, near brooks, in forest land near monasteries. The monks come daily to bring them food, leaving it at a respectful distance. These hermits, called "babetawi", are paradoxically regarded as "loving mankind", as praying for the well-being of all "orthodox"

792 believers, but as quick in anger when a human face disturbs their solitude. Legends tell of hermits who, receiving a "call", returned to the temporal world as prophets and leaders of men. But this is regarded as rare. During their lifetime the hermits are held in awe, and even after their death they are believed to haunt their earthy cave-ledges, so that passers-by talk in whispers only, and fear to come too close.

(d) Utensils of the Church.

793 The headgear of the priests, "mātāmāmiya", is a
292 turban-like affair, basically a white muslin wrapped around the head or the cylindrical cap ("qob"). Monks wear the "qob" without the muslin, and, in many monasteries, used to dye their "qob" as well as their robes yellow. In recent years the yellow color is falling into disuse, and white--believed to be the color of mourning for the passing of Christ, is worn alternately with black caps and capes. Black is evidently due to acculturation. It first entered in the form of imported chintz capes for the bishops and upper clergy in the time of Menelik II, and has spread, due to the Italian occupation.

[22] Like noblemen, middle and higher clergy wear the kaba, the heavy, woolen, sleeveless cape, and carry an especially good "chera" (flyswitch) of guresa-monkey hair. Priests wear the narrow white jodphurs at all times,

887 nobility they have moved as high in position as their inherited potential allows.

886 In appearance he usually grows a chin beard, which comes late, usually not before the age of thirty, and is greying when a man becomes a "shemagalā" at about 40. At that time he is usually a grandfather.

As ruler at the apex of his own social pyramid, he is limited only by direct physical strength, in which no one expects him to excel. But if a former warrior, he may be vain and not admit his fading physical strength, and try to show that he can still hold up against young men in warlike games. This is the only time when an elder is occasionally mocked, as "abārra" (lit. he struts).

888 Dependency in old age is no problem among rural kin groups living on settled land, whether their own or rented. Even in senility, the elder is respected and cared for; even when, as he himself admits, he is "good only for guarding chickens" (tērtē alā - became senile).

888 However, dependency of an old woman is a more difficult prob-

792 lem, though she, too, is generally cared for. But since she has no functions of leadership, her status lacks the positive, if she becomes a widow, and is too weak to perform the household labors

[45] of women. Also, women fade physically more rapidly than men. As a result, the "abālat" or "balat", a greying woman past menopause, or widow of serious mind and spirit, often takes vows as a nun, wears the "qob" of a nun though continuing in her old residence, and spends much time in the churchyard, working in the "betalehem" but where beer and bread for church use are prepared. Nuns are always old women, partly because it is not considered proper for a

888 young, "not-yet-serious" young woman, partly because there is no
792 career involved, as there is in case of young men who become monks.

Though there are usually fewer widows than widowers (due to the mortality in connection with childbirth), the lot of a widow is not a happy one. The proverb says:

[539]

"Now that my fortune (husband) has died,
what will my mother-in-law give me?"

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Without the kin group, an aging man, especially if sick, blind or crippled, has little protection. The church is not eager to have [792] him as a monk, for it can recruit younger men for its service, as a career, and an old man is much less useful in the churchyard than an old woman. He may, especially if landless, or in town, be reduced to beggary. There he sits at the approaches to the churches, repeating his demanding, ceaseless litany: "Selä Medhane Alām, solä Maryām, solä Giyorgis" (For sake of the Savior, of Mary, of St. George), stretching out an open hand. Sometimes he may send out a child to beg for him, either because he is too bashful, or is using it as a technique. Little boys will thus attach themselves to a potential donor, repeating "babba, babba" (babytalk for "daddy").

[608]

They have already learned the concept of artificial kinship to establish human relationships.

5. The End of Life: Eulogy, Memorial Services and Feasts.

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When an elder is close to death, other elders from among his nearest kin come with his confessor, and say to him: "Confess yourself". When he has done so, they ask him for his last will: "What do you give to your children, and for your soul (i.e. to the church, through the confessor, to the poor)". While fields and cattle are given to the descendants, (the former only in patrilineal descent), personal belongings such as exhide mats, shamma

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without light, except in the lamps or chandeliers, for they ^{They say the prayers by heart and} 796
 have not got lamps. They burn butter in these chandeliers, 782
 for they have not got oil. They pray or chaunt very loud, [373]
 without art of singing, and they do not recite (alternate) [354]
 verses, but all sing straight on. Their prayers are psalms, and [237]
 on feast days besides psalms they recite prose, according as [533]
 the feast is so is the prose. They always stand in the
 churches; at matins they only say one single lesson: this
 is said by a priest or a friar, rather shouted than intoned,
 and he reads this lesson before the principal entrance.
 When this lesson is finished, on Saturdays, Sundays, and 792
 feast days, they make a procession with four or five crosses 796
 on their poles, and a cross not so much raised as carried
 like a stick in the left hand, because they carry a thurible
 in the right hand, since as many as carry a cross carry a
 thurible, there are always as many thuribles as crosses.
 They wear some silk cloaks, not well made, because they [292]
 are not wider than the width of a piece of damask, or other
 silk from top to bottom. Before the breast, a cross piece to
 the flanks on each side, of any other stuff and of any colour,
 even though it should not match the principal part, and of
 this principal part a good ell hangs behind dragging on the
 ground. They make this processaion through the circuit,
 which is like a cloister. This being ended, on the said
 Saturdays, Sundays, and feasts, he who has to say mass
 enters with two others into the chancel; they bring out an [178]
 effigy of Our Lady, which they have in ancient pictures in all
 churches and monasteries. He who has to say mass places
 himself in the centre of the transept with his face towards
 the principal entrance, and the image in his hands held
 before his breast: and those who stand by his sides hold
 lighted candles in their hands, and all the others commence
 a chaunt like prose, and all walk, shouting and leaping as if
 dancing¹, they hold hands and go round, before the

¹ *Como en chacota*, dancing and singing, i.e., not reverentially.

CHURCH SERVICES.

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those who are at the other curtain, and thence to the 796
secular people who are at the principal door, both men and 782
women, if it is a church to which women come. At the
giving of the communion, and likewise at all the offices of
the church, all are standing up. When they come to
receive the communion, all come with their hands raised
before their shoulders, and the palms forward. As soon as
each one receives the sacrament of the blood he takes the
said water as has been said, and so generally as many as are
communicants. Before mass they wash their hands with
the water which is in all the churches and monasteries.
The priest who said the mass, and those who stood with him
at the altar, when the communion is ended, return to the
altar, and wash the vase in which the sacrament was, with
the water which remains in the ewer, which they say is
blessed, this water they pour into the chalice, and the priest
who said mass takes it all. This done, one of these ministers
of the altar takes a cross and a bell, and beginning a low
chaunt goes to the principal entrance, where the epistle and
gospel were read, and the administering the communion
ended, and as many as are in the church, and outside of
it, bow their heads, and go away in peace. They say this is
the blessing, without this no one goes away. On Saturdays
and Sundays, and feast days, in all the churches and
monasteries, blessed bread is distributed. The method
which they have in this small monastery, which will not [192] ●
have more than 20 or 25 friars, is that which is followed in
all the monasteries and churches, great and small. The
office of the mass, exclusive of the processions, is short;
and the mass on week days is quickly finished.

346 is painted, it is not certain whether it is stone or wood. It has two sets of cloisters round the body of the church, both covered in, and much painted with figures of apostles, patriarchs, prophets, and many things of the Old Law, and many angels, and St. George on horseback, who is in all the churches. This monastery also possesses a great cloth, like a piece of tapestry, on which is the crucifix and effigy of Our Lady and the apostles, and other figures of patriarchs and prophets, and each one has his Latin name written, so that no man of the country made it. It has many small and ancient pictures, not well made, and they are not upon the altars, for it is not their custom: they keep them in a [212] sacristy, mixed up with many books, and they bring them out on feast days. There is in this monastery a very large kitchen and bakehouse, also a very large refectory, in which 792 they eat. They mostly eat three and three¹ in a large dish, 262 it is not deep, but flat like a tray, and their food is very [264] poor. The bread is of maize and barley, and other grain which they call *taffo*,² a small black grain. They make this bread round, and of the size and roundness of a citron,³ and they give three of these to each friar: to the novices they give three loaves to two of them, it is a matter of amazement how they can maintain themselves. They also give them a few vegetables, without salt or oil. Of this food they send to a great many old pensioners, who do not come to the refectory. Besides seeing these things when we 792 buried Matthens, I saw them many times, because I came there to pass time with the friars, principally on feast days, when we were near there. In this way I learned about them and their property, and revenues and customs. In my opinion there were generally always a hundred friars in this

¹ By threes.² Mansfield Parkins calls it *teff*, the species of corn most esteemed in this country.³ Zambon, not referred to in Selves' translation.

monastery, most of them old men of great age, and as dry 792 ●
as wood; very few young men. This monastery is entirely
surrounded by a wall, and this wall is closed with two [346]
gates, which are always locked.

CAP. XIV.—*How the monastery of Bisan is the head of six
monasteries, of the number of the brothers, and ornaments,
of the "castar"* which they do to Philip, whom they call
a Saint.

This monastery is the head of six monasteries, which are 792
around it in these mountains; the furthest off is at a 793
distance of three leagues from it, and all are subject to it,
and are governed and ruled by it. In each of them is a
David, that is a guardian appointed by the Abbot or pro-
vincial of this monastery, who is also David under the
Abba. I always heard say that there were in this monastery
three thousand friars, and because I doubted it much I 792
came here to keep the feast of our Lady of August, in
order to see if they would come together. Certainly I
rejoiced to see the riches of this monastery, and the pro-
cession which they made: in my judgment the friars did
not exceed three hundred, and most of them were very old.
There is a circuit to this monastery which surrounds the two [346]
which are like cloisters covered in, and this one which is not
covered in was on that occasion all covered in with brocades
and inferior brocades, and velvets of Mekkah, all long
pieces, sewn one to another in order that they might
shelter the whole circuit. They made a very beautiful
procession through this canopied circuit; all wore cloaks of [292]
the same stuffs, brocades, and velvets of Mekkah, badly
made as I mentioned above. They carried fifty small
crosses of silver, of bad workmanship, and as many

¹ Should be *teskar*.

- 792 thuribles of copper. When mass was said, I saw a great gold chalice and gold spoon, with which they administered the communion. Of the three hundred friars who came to this monastery, very few were those that I knew as belonging to it: and I asked some of my friends how it was, that with so large a number of friars in the monastery as they said, they were not present at such a feast. They told me that even though there were more than they had said, that they were scattered about in these monasteries and churches, and markets, to seek for their living, because that could not be in the monastery whilst they were young men; and when they were old men, and could not walk, they came to die in the monastery. On that day I saw the habit put on seventeen young men. There is a tomb in this monastery which they say is of an Abba or provincial of 778 this monastery who is named Philip, and they give him the 776 merits of a Saint, saying that there was a King Prester John who commanded that Saturday should not be observed in his kingdoms and lordships, and this Abba Philip went to that King Prester with his friars, and undertook to show how God had commanded that Saturday should be kept, and that whoever did not keep it should die by stoning, and that he would maintain this before all the fathers of Ethiopia: and he made it good before the King. Therefore 796 they say that he was a Saint for making Saturday to be 782 kept, and they treat him as a Saint, and they hold a feast for him every year, in the month of July, which they call *Castar* Philip, which means funeral or memorial of Philip.¹ On this account the people of this monastery are the most Judaizing of all the kingdoms of Prester John. I came twice to this *Castar* of Philip, at which they did me much honour, and they kill many cows at this feast. In one year they killed thirty, and in another year twenty-eight, and in

¹ *Castar* should be *Teskar*; Mansfield Parkyns calls it a sort of funereal feast, where charities are bestowed on the poor and the priests.

each of the years that I came there they gave me two ⁷⁹⁶ quarters of the fattest cow that was killed. This flesh is ⁷⁸² distributed amongst the people who come to the Castar, and the friars have none because they do not eat meat. And ^[84] these cows are all brought as offerings by their breeders in the district, who vow them to Philip. This monastery, and the others that are subject to it, have this rule in addition, that no females enter them, that is to say, neither women, nor she-mules, nor cows, nor hens, nor anything else that is female. And these cows which they kill are killed a long way from the wall, and when I came there they came to the distance of a cross-bow shot to take my mule, and they took her away to their farm of Jamgargara, where Mattheus died.

CAP. XV.—*Of the agriculture of this country, and how they preserve themselves from the wild beasts, and of the revenues of the monastery.*

The friars of this monastery, and of the other monasteries ²⁴¹ subject to it, might do good works by planting trees and ^[792] vines, and making gardens and orchards for their exercise; and they do nothing. The country is ready to produce everything, as is seen from that which is uncultivated: they do not plant or grow anything except millet and bee-hives. ^[231] When it is night, neither they nor anybody else go out from their houses from fear of the wild beasts that are in the country, and those who watch the millet have very high resting places upon the trees, in which they sleep at night. In the district of this monastery there are, in the valleys ²³¹ between the mountains, very large herds of cows, kept by ⁵⁶³ Arab Moors, and there go with each herd forty or fifty Moors, with their wives and children: and their headman is

- 231 a Christian, because the cows that they keep belong to
 563 Christian gentlemen of the country of the Barnagais. These
 Moors have nothing else for their labour than the milk and
 butter which they get from the cows, and with this they
 maintain themselves and their wives and children. On
 some occasions it happened to us to sleep near these Arabs,
 they accosted us to ask if we wished to buy cows, and for
 the price allowed us to choose them. They say that these
 [484] Moors, and headmen who go with them, are all robbers
 under the favour of the lords to whom the cows belong,
 and so only large caravans travel. The revenues of this
 ● 792 monastery are very large; those which I saw and heard of
 631 are, chiefly, this mountain in which the monastery is situated,
 361 of an extent of ten leagues, in which they sow much millet,
 [243] barley, rye, and all these pay dues to the monastery, and
 they are also paid on the herds. On the skirts of this
 mountain there are many large villages, and most of them
 belong to the monastery, and at a distance of one or two
 days' journey an infinite number of places belonging to the
 monastery, and are called *Gultus* of the monastery, which
 means *coutos* or *celeiros*,¹ according to our Portugal. Don
 Rodrigo the ambassador and I were going on the road to
 the Court, a good five days' journey from this monastery,
 and arriving at a town which is named *Caina* we kept
 Saturday and Sunday in a small village which might contain
 twenty people, and they told us they belonged to the
 monastery of Bisan. Besides that town there were a
 hundred villages all belonging to the monastery, and that
 in which we halted was one of them. We were also shown
 651 many of the others, and they told us that every three years
 631 they paid a horse to the monastery, and that each village
 792 did this, which makes thirty-three horses every year. And
 in order to be certain of this I went to ask it of the *Alicazi*
 of the monastery, which means the auditor or major-domo,

¹ *Couto*, an asylum, an enclosure; *celeiro*, a granary.

because he receives, and does justice: he told me that it was true that they paid the said horsea. I asked why the monastery wanted so many horses, since they did not ride on them. He told me that they were obliged to pay horses, but that they did not give him horses, but paid fifty cows for each horse, and that this due of horses was so because these were villages of the King which paid him this due, and as he had endowed the monastery with these villages, between the monastery and the villagers this due of horses had been transmuted into cows. And over and above these dues of cows they also pay dues on fruits. Besides, at fifteen days' journey from the monastery, in the kingdom of Tigre mahom, there is a very large town belonging to the monastery named Aadete, which may be a large dukedom. This pays every year sixty horses, and an infinite number of dues and customs. In this district there are always more than a thousand friars of the monastery, because there are many churches in it, and the monastery is much favoured there. Of these friars some are very good, honourable, and devout, and others are not such. Besides these dues of horses paid to this monastery and to others, there are many villages belonging to the King which pay dues of the said horses, because this is always his due, and there are villages neighbouring to Egypt in which are large and good horses, and others near Arabia in which they are very good, but not so much so as those of Egypt.

CAP. XVI.—*How the friars impeded our departure, and of what happened to us on the road.*

Returning therefore to our journey; whilst we were still at the monastery of St. Michael there arrived the man sent by the Barnagais to take us away, and with him two of our Portuguese, on the fourth day of the month of June; and he

346 other women do in the church of the apostles, who take it
 562 in its place. I always saw the women of the Barnagais go
 [644] to the women's church to take the communion with the
 other women, and I did not see them use the privilege
 which they say they have, of taking the communion, with
 one damsel, in the church of the men. The circuits of the
 churchyards join to one another; they are of very high
 796 walls. They make the sacramental bread for both churches
 in one building, and they say the masses in both churches
 at the same time, and the priests who serve in one church
 serve also in the other; that is two thirds of the priests
 in the men's church, and one third in the women's church,
 and so they are distributed. These churches have not got
 tithes, but they have got much land belonging to the priests,
 and they put it out to profit and divide the revenues of the
 lands among themselves: the Barnagais gives what is
 necessary to the churches, such as ornaments, wax, butter,
 incense in sufficient quantity, and he supplies them with
 [792] everything. There may be in these churches twenty priests
 and always twenty-two friars. I never saw a church of
 priests which had not got friars, nor a monastery of friars
 which had got priests; because the friars are so nu-
 merous that they cover the world, both in the monasteries
 as also in the churches, roads, and markets: they are in
 every place.

CAP. XXVI.—*How the priests are, and how they are ordained,
 and of the reverence which they pay to the churches and
 their churchyards.*

793
 684 The priests are married to one wife, and they observe the
 587 law of matrimony better than the laity: they live in their
 houses with their wives and children. If their (wife should
 die they do not marry again; neither can the wife, but she

443 places which are chief towns of districts, every week. The fairs consist of bartering one thing for another, as for instance, an ass for a cow, and that which is of least value gives to the other two or three measures of bread. By means of bread they buy stuffs, and with stuffs they buy mules and cows, and whatever they want, for salt, incense, pepper, myrrh, camphor, and other small articles.¹ They buy fowls and capons, and whatever they need or want to buy is all to be found at these fairs in exchange for others, for there is no current money. The principal merchants at these fairs are priests, friars, and nuns. The friars are decent in their habits, which are full, and reaching to the ground. Some wear yellow habits of coarse cotton stuff, others habits of tanned goat skins like wide breeches,² also yellow. The nuns also wear the same habits; the friars wear, besides, capes of the fashion of Dominican friars, of the same yellow skins or stuffs, they wear hats; and the nuns wear neither capes nor hats, but [302] only the habit, and are shaven with a razor; and they wear a leather strap wound or fastened round the head. When they are old women they wear fillets³ round their heads over their tonsures. These nuns are not cloistered, nor do they live together in convents, but in villages, and in the monasteries of the friars, on account of belonging to those houses and order. The order is all one, and the nuns give obedience where they receive their habits. With regard to entering churches and monasteries, the nuns do not enter except as other women do. There is a great multitude of nuns, as well as of friars; they say that some of them are very holy women, and others are not so. The priests show very little difference from the laity in their dress, because all 793 302 wear a good cloth wrapped round, like smart men, and their [292] difference is that they carry a cross in their hand, and are shaven, and the laity wear long hair. The priests also have

¹ *Bechgurias*.² *Zafons or Safons*.³ *Tufas*.

404 ANSWERS TO ARCHBISHOP OF BRAGA'S QUESTIONS.

136 ^{There} is no fish there except very little from the rivers; from the sea none.

795 There are no monasteries except of St. Anthony, and
 792 not of any other order, as some friars say who come from there.

291 The gentlemen, monks, canons, and priests are clothed; most of the other people are bare from the waist upwards, and a sheepskin on the shoulders, with the front and hind feet tied together.

792 Most of the monasteries are situated on high mountains,
 346 or in great ravines; they have large revenues and jurisdiction. In many monasteries they do not eat meat all the
 [262] year, and fish very few times, as they have not go it in the country. The services of these monasteries are psalms and prose, and so it is done in the churches of the canons.

796 Every church has two curtains, one on this side of the altar with little bells, and no one but priests enter inside this curtain; and another curtain in the middle of the church. And no one but persons in orders enter the church, and many gentlemen and honourable persons are ordained in order to enter the church. They go to the door of all the churches and monasteries to read the epistles and gospels, and they say them rapidly, and there they give the communion to the people.

The priests consecrate at the altar, and do not show the sacrament. When the priest who says mass comes to take the communion, he takes a particle from the top, and the other two large parts he leaves for the communion of the people. All the people who come to the church have to receive the communion every day, or else not come to church. When the communion is ended, they give them a little blessed water with which they wash their mouths.

Nobody sits down in the church, nor do they enter it shod; they do not hem or spit, nor do they let any dog or other animal come into the church. They confess standing,

- 784 He says that during all Passion week they are dressed in black or blue, and do not speak to one another for grief, saying that Judas by a kiss of peace betrayed his Lord.
- 532 Although there are in the churches effigies painted on all 784 the walls, and also crosses, nevertheless on no cross is a crucifix painted, neither have they any of solid carving; because they say they are not deserving to see Christ crucified.
- 792 All the priests, friars, and gentlemen carry crosses in their 778 hands, both on foot and on horseback; and the laymen of the people and lower people carry crosses round their necks. Every priest and friar carries a little horn of copper with holy water, and the hosts where they arrive beg of them water and a blessing, and they give it. Before they eat they throw drops of water on the food, and also in the drinking vases.
- 411 Their arms are assagays, few swords, a few shirts of mail, long and narrow; our Portuguese say that they are not of good mail.
- There are many bows and arrows, they have no feathers like ours; there are very few helmets and casques. Those that there are have come since they have had intercourse with the Portuguese. There are plenty of strong bucklers;
- 713 there are no cannon, except two swivel guns which we brought them. At our departure there were fourteen muskets at Court, which they bought from the Turks who come there to trade. The Prester ordered whatever they asked to be given for them, and ordered men to be taught to shoot.
- 534 There are trumpets, but not good ones; there are many drums of copper which come from Cairo, and others of wood which have leather on both sides; there are tambourines like ours, and large cymbals which they sound. There are flutes and some instruments with chords, square like harps, which they call David moçanquo, which means the harp of David. They play these to the Prester, and not well.

317 one ounce to ten of gold, which gives it a very pale colour.

703 N. B. This observation is sufficiently confirmed by the colour of those links that still remain of the honorary gold chain conferred on Mr Bruce by the king of Abyssinia. These links are of a paler hue than a common guinea, rather coarsely made, and unpolished. Gold chains, called in Habesh *sunsulé*, are a mark of dignity bestowed by the sovereign on the most meritorious persons in his army. It is usual to give a splendid suit of clothes at the same time, an Egyptian and Persian custom; vide Genesis, xli. 42. and Esther, viii. 15.

651 Wechne, in Belessen, is about 34 or 35 miles, a long day's journey from Emfras. There is paid, to maintain the royal family on the mountain, 250 ounces gold, and 730 cloths (this means webs of cotton cloth, called *shuma*). This is an old establishment. None are permitted to go up but the women carrying water. There was formerly a cistern, but it is now in ruins, and useless. There are near 300 persons there; and all the exiles are allowed to marry. Bacuffa escaped by help of his sister.

793 Extreme unction is unknown in Abyssinia; that is, the anointing with oil. However, when a person is attacked with sickness, which threatens death, he often puts on a monk's hood, as a token that in case of recovery, he will abandon the world, and then receives the last sacrament, or rather he does so before putting it on; and it is generally the custom to distribute all his moveables to the churches, which the priests appropriate. These are traces of extreme unction. The great men often renounce the hood, and return to their former life.

792 N. B. The Abyssinian MS. histories are full of these instances, in which the great men, when disappointed in politics, retire to *Waldubba*, or other deserts, to live as monks. The distribution of goods and money made by the kings, when sick, to the churches, occurs in almost every reign. Before *Yasous II.* died, the Chronicle says, that he had given away every thing he had, in this way, except the crown on his head. When *Joas* was proclaimed, the *Itege* his grandmother wished to give a present to the poor, as usual at the begin-

ning of a reign; which she could not do, until one of the nobles supplied her with a sum of money. There were only a few derims left in the treasury. 792

Abyssinian Harvests. They first sow barley from the end of April to the beginning of May, or later; that is, towards the first rains. This ripens in the rains in June; and is carried off the fields into the house, that it may not rot. Then they sow fitches, which likewise ripen in the rains after. In September they sow wheat, or teff, which is cut down in December; and, if they have water, they sow barley, or fitches, again in January. In Woggora (a very fertile province), there is seed-time, and harvest, and plowing, in every month in the year; water being easily diverted to the grounds. The rent paid to the king for the ground is one-tenth of what they reap, yet, with all this, they are all poor; for a harvest, at a medium, is about twenty after one; and they sometimes, nay, very often, scarce reap the seed. They never manure the ground; and there are great quantities of rats, and innumerable ants, that consume their corn at different, nay, at all periods of its growth. All their five harvests do not, in produce, equal one Egyptian one; and they are at five times the labour. In the several villages, living, in general, is very miserable; and, in general, people of consideration scarcely know any other diet than teff bread and bouza. Whether this teff is black, or white, is the whole difference between the diet of master and servant. [511] [262]

Abyssinian Dress. The principal part of the dress of the natives is a large cotton cloth, 24 peek (cubits) in length, and one and a half in breadth, with a blue and yellow stripe round the bottom of it. This blue is not dyed; but the Sur-at blue cloths are unravelled and woven for this purpose; and the yellow they dye with sūf, the yellow thistle. The best for ordinary wear costs 10 salts, or 1½ pataka, about 6s. 6d. [435] English. It is called Kuara, as probably coming from that province. They are very beautiful and light. The other pieces of dress are breeches, which reach to their mid-thighs; and girt with a white girdle of cloth to the common people; but the better sort have red Indian cotton cloths for breeches; and silk, or worsted coloured girdles from the Levant. When they ride, they only hold their stirrups between their great and 492

180 NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA

793 Menelik, who made the Abouna supreme head of all matters; the *Itcheque* second with residence at the great national monastery of Debra Libanos; and the High Priest third in the hierarchy.

794 The wealth and influence of the Church are enormous, a state of affairs due to the prescience of Tekla
793 Haimanot, to whom reference has already been made.

792 This remarkable man is supposed to have negotiated the restoration of the Solomonean line after three hundred years of deposition, and his modest price seems to have been a perpetual grant to the Church of one-third of the country. As a result the extent of the Church lands is tremendous: not only do monasteries, convents, and churches cover the country but great areas belong to them, and the revenues accruing therefrom are utilized to maintain an almost unbelievable number of monks, priests, and *debtera*. The numbers of these people were given to me by Abyssinians as over a million—this is of course absurd—but I was assured on good authority that over a quarter of the male population are included in these categories of parasites. And parasites they are, for they serve no useful purpose and exist on the taxes raised from the people working on the land: they do no work themselves and are even exempted from military service. They are on the whole ignorant and illiterate, for while some of them can read, very few indeed can write.

793 Monks are not supposed to marry: priests are
792 allowed to marry once, and in fact do so: *debtera* are free as laymen; but I do not think that the lives of many of them could profitably be held up as examples for the people to follow.

793 No examination and little or no preparation seem

41 / *The Legacy of Manz and Gondar*

Perhaps this sort of disposition was not unrelated to the part Manz played in 181 sparking the restoration of Amhara rule in Shoa, thereby preparing the way 175* for the dramatic resurgence and expansion of the Ethiopian state at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Gondar Ethos

The unique character of Gondar derives first of all from the fact that it was 175* a city. During the whole period of Ethiopian history reviewed in this chap- 633 ter, the Gondar period was the only time in which the emperors resided in a 643 fixed capital, and Gondar was the only permanent population center that grew beyond the contours of a large village. As in ancient Egypt before the rise of Thebes, the concept of the city had played scarcely any role in the political thinking of the Amhara, and so anomalous was the rise of Gondar that Ludolphus, writing in the fifth decade after the founding of Gondar, could not believe stories that Gondar was a large city and predicted that "perhaps in a few years there will be nothing to be seen of it."⁶⁰

Like many oriental cities, Gondar consisted more of a collection of small 175* homogeneous societies than of a diffused heterogeneous urban population. 633 The city was divided into several quarters, each of which lived its own life. 361 The imperial compound was of course foremost of these. It contained the great complex of buildings erected during more than a hundred years, from Fasil to Iyasu II, and was the seat of affairs of state. The compound was sepa- (333) rated from the rest of the city by a stone wall, whose twelve well-guarded gates each served a special function or class of people.⁶¹

The nobility resided in a quarter known as Gaing Bêt. Here the dwellings (565) were spaced at comfortable distances, and nearly every house was surrounded (351) by a garden. Abyssinians of lower rank lived in the more densely populated sections of Faras Bêt and Denkâkê.

The Christian hierarchy had its own quarters. The *abuna*, an Egyptian monk appointed by the Coptic Patriarch at Alexandria as spiritual head of the Ethiopian Church, lived with his retinue in one sector.⁶² Another area, Eçhagê (792) Bêt, was reserved for the Amhara monk who served as administrative head of the Church. Each church compound, moreover, was the focus of another residential section, where its clergy kept their modest huta. The Eçhagê Bêt and (798) the church compounds were considered sanctuaries and thus, in theory at least, were secure from plunderers. The Gondarês and wealthy people from the country used these areas as a safety vault for their valuables.

The ethnic groups which settled in Gondar had their respective ghettos. 175* The Muslims lived in the lower part of the city adjacent to the river Qlha, 633 which was convenient for their ritual ablutions. They were looked down on 361 by the Christians, and meat slaughtered by one group would not be touched 563 by the other. Poncet observed that when an Abyssinian met a Muslim in the (86) 576

167 / *The Old and New Elites*

It was at this time that the *makadament* came into their own. More un-175
 abashedly than ever they constituted, not a hereditary aristocracy in corporate 565
 opposition to the king, but a plurality of proud centers of rank—partly in- 642
 herited, partly achieved—enjoying virtual autonomy. To move toward a
 modern nation it would be necessary to brake their centrifugal force.

The Clergy

Like the nobility, the clergy may be divided into those who are significant 793
 at the national level and those who are primarily local dignitaries. The former 792
 reside close to the imperial court, while the latter are thickly distributed
 around monasteries, churches, and wildernesses all over the country.

The highest ecclesiastical authority in Abyssinia was the *abuna* who, from
 the time of Frumentius in the fourth century until the death of Abuna Qerlos
 in 1949, was with few exceptions an appointee of the Coptic Patriarch at
 Alexandria. Chosen from the Egyptian monks of the convent of St. Anthony
 near the Red Sea, the *abuna* was brought, at great expense to the emperor,
 to live out his life in an alien land. Ignorant of the language and customs of
 the country, he played little part in the conduct of church affairs or in affairs
 of court; and when he did try to do so, his efforts were usually abruptly
 checked by jealous clerics and suspicious kings. His functions were purely
 ritual, but indispensable: he alone had authority to anoint and crown the
 emperor, to confer orders, and to absolve vows. From numerous revenues,
 rents, and fees, the *abuna* enjoyed a considerable income. Like the emperor,
 he was regarded as sacred because of the charisma of his office, and spent
 most of his time secluded from the public.²⁰

Second in rank was the *efshagē*, an appointment made by the emperor.
 This was the traditional title of the abbot of the convent of Dabra Libānos
 in Shoa, which in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries gained
 hegemony over Abyssinian monasticism. The *efshagē* served as administrative
 head of the church and had jurisdiction over all monks and monasteries.
 The most esteemed of the Ethiopian clergy, he tended to wield more actual
 power than the *abuna*. His provincial deputies, called *liqa kähənās*, controlled
 the secular clergy. This office was also bestowed by the emperor, and its
 functions included presenting candidates for ordination and deciding ques-
 tions of protocol in connection with religious ceremonies.

In addition to these supreme dignitaries of the church, a small number of 793
 churchmen enjoyed pre-eminent status by virtue of their activities at the 644
 imperial court. These included the *aqabbē sū'āt* ("guardian of the [canonical]
 hours"), the chief ecclesiastic at court, and during part of the reign of Zar'a
 Yā'qob the only official with unrestricted access to the king; the *qēs kähəsē*
 ("king's chaplain"); the *liqa dābtarā* ("chief of the *dābtarā*"); and *liqa*
mammerān ("chief of the learned men"). These four served as the four su- [693]

793 preme judges at the royal court, and the *aqabē sāt* ranked third—in some
644 lists, first—in the official order of precedence of all court dignitaries.⁴⁰

(693) One other church dignitary, finally, was the *nebra ed*, chief of the sacred district of Aksum, who always enjoyed a high position at the royal court. When appointed by the emperor (instead of by the provincial governor who sometimes possessed that authority), the *nebra ed* enjoyed the rare privilege of being permitted to sit while speaking in the event of his involvement in litigation.

793 The status of the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries was based on approxi-
554 mately the same factors as those which determined the status of secular nobility: royal favor; family background, in the case of those whose fathers were important nobles or noted churchmen; and the possession of wealth, political power, and imposing titles.⁴¹ The same was true of their regional counterparts, the *alaqā*, "chiefs" of large churches and monasteries, whose wealth, power, and leisurely mode of life gave them, in Plowden's opinion, "perhaps the most enviable position in Abyssinia."⁴²

793 The status of the clergy as a whole, however, rested on three other prin-
792 ciples which are not affected by royal favor, birth, or worldly possessions.
554 These were: contact with the most sacred symbols of religious authority; ascetic piety; and religious learning. Broadly speaking, in Abyssinia these three principles have been embodied primarily in three distinct roles, namely, those of priest, monk, and *dabtārd*.

793 A normal preparation for these roles—necessarily so, in the case of the
794 priesthood—is service as a deacon. Ability to read is, now as before, a requisite qualification for the diaconate, but that requirement has in the past often been overlooked. More important has been the requirement of ordination by the *abuna*. Ordination formerly took place in the company of hundreds of other aspirants and, when there was uncertainty about the future availability of an *abuna*, even babes in arms were admitted.⁴³

794 The traditional garb of the deacon is a yellowish cape made of sheepskins,
292 though on holidays the officiating deacons may be dressed in richly colored silk robes like the priests. The duties of the deacon—and they are accounted great and secret privileges—are to prepare the sacramental bread, fetch the holy water, and assist at the Mass (the performance of which normally requires two priests and three deacons).

793 On reaching puberty a deacon is no longer supposed to serve in the church,
794 for fear that he will become "impure." At that time he may decide to prepare for the priesthood. For this two qualifications must be met. He must have completed his study of reading and, ideally, of *sēmā*, the chants that are intoned in the liturgy of the Mass. These matters he may learn from the older clergy during his service as a deacon, or from his father, who, in many cases, is a priest himself. Otherwise, he goes off in search of a master. He

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793 and misreading sacred texts in a language they have never understood. They
 (293) are notorious drinkers, so much so that a modern Ethiopian novelist has one
 of his characters, a priest, ask: "If one stops drinking, what else is left in this
 world?"⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the prestige of the priests was unassailable in Amhara culture.
 Whatever their personal life, they represented the value of ritual sanctity,
 which made it possible for the Mass to be performed in the local churches.
 So long as they had been duly ordained and did not break their lawful mar-
 riage bond, they were part of a sacred class. Combes and Tamisier remarked
 upon this in the 1830's:

Despite all their vices, these priests manage to make themselves respected;
 when they pass along the roads, the faithful bow deeply to them, and in no
 matter what gathering they appear, everyone rises and hurries to kiss their
 hands.⁴⁵

793 Privileged contact with the sacred symbols of the church—ordination by the
 798 sacrosanct *abuna*, exclusive access to the *sabot*, and officiation at the Eucharist
 —gave the priests an authority that was independent both of political dis-
 pensation and of personal accomplishment.

793 Other groups within the clergy have been highly esteemed for quite differ-
 • 792 ent reasons. Those who become monks carry great weight because they
 embody the virtue of ascetic piety. The *dabtard*, on the other hand, are re-
 spected for their erudition.

792 Monks usually come from two kinds of background: unwed deacons de-
 siring to spend their lives as monks, and priests whose wives have died. But
 previous ecclesiastical connection is not necessary for the monastic calling,
 nor is the ability to read required. The essential qualification is the willing-
 ness to renounce the world. The word for becoming a monk (*manakwasa*)
 means to renounce earthly things. A prospective monk may be of the sort
 described by one of Walker's informants:

An old man who has married many wives and divorced them one by one,
 may say, "Henceforth it suffices me! Let the world remain lost to me! I am
 to turn my face to God!"⁴⁶

In earlier times the monastic life was sought by men from all walks of life,
 including lords, soldiers, even emperors, in consequence of some grievous
 affliction, or perhaps a vow made in time of trouble, or excessive *Weltschmerz*.

Heads of monasteries have the jurisdiction to confer the monastic status.
 One who desires this status bequeathes his worldly possessions and goes
 (292) through a ceremony in the church in which his body is declared dead. The
 symbol of the monastic state is a little cloth skullcap (*askēma*). Once he has
 become a monk, an Ethiopian is a legal nonentity. This frees him from all

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tax obligations and any debts he may have incurred, for which advantage many have become monks for other than spiritual motives.⁷⁷ 792°

No specific duties or obligations are required of a monk. Abyssinian monks have spent their years in a variety of ways. One extreme is anchoritism. Many have become hermits, feeding only on roots and herbs, and have sought even greater self-mortification by such practices as standing for long periods in icy water or wearing iron girdles lined with points. Others have lived somewhat closer to human society, wandering about the country as mendicants or making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Others have attached themselves, for shorter or longer periods, to monasteries, spending long periods in prayer and fasting and doing some humble work like collecting wood or, if formerly a priest, assisting at the Mass with the other priests. A few have proselytized in non-Christian areas. Some monks, on the other hand, have left the world only to rejoin it at a higher level. These become advisers to grandees or themselves serve as governors of districts. 792 785

Whatever the shortcomings of individual monks, the monastic calling as a whole has enjoyed the highest esteem in Ethiopia. Monks have exerted a great influence on the thinking and behavior of the people. Itinerant hermits have harangued the people to live more pious lives. The counsel of monks has been of help to rulers in time of trouble. The prophecies of monks have been influential in setting the pattern of hopes and fears about the future. 792

The role of the *dabtarä* is quite different. The *dabtarä*'s combination of functions is unusual—he is at once chorister, poet, dancer, herbologist, scribe, and wizard. It is also remarkable that so indispensable a functionary in the Ethiopian Church has no formal position in the church hierarchy. 793

With its characteristic forbearance toward human frailty, Amhara culture has established in the *dabtarä* a religious vocation in which special knowledge is required but holiness is not expected. The vocation is thus sought by those who do not care to be bound by the strict conditions of the priesthood, or by priests who have found these conditions too much to live with, so have been divorced or remarried. Recruitment into the role is informal: there are no rites of ordination, nor is there any particular point at which a man becomes or ceases to be a *dabtarä*.

Becoming a *dabtarä* mainly entails a course of study beyond that minimal level required for the priests. The full course of traditional studies includes the vast corpus of religious chants; *äquäquäm* ("religious dance"); Ge'ez grammar and *qenä*; and study of some two dozen religious books. Mastery of the entire curriculum, which takes at least twenty to thirty years according to traditional methods of pedagogy, is rarely accomplished. In addition the student acquires other knowledge *sub rosa* from private tutors: knowledge of writing, preparation of magic formulae, and the use of herbs.

793 The *dabtarā*'s way of life is more variable than that of the monk, his possibilities for income more diverse than those of the priest. He may be attached to a church as a chorister and receive a share of the church's revenues, as do the priests. Or he may donate his services to the church and earn his living by secular employment. He may work as a scribe at the court of a king or nobleman. He may spend most of his time teaching, gaining support from some large church or monastery. Like many priests he may cultivate land. (212) In any case, he is likely to derive some income from the sale of amulets and from medical therapies. Some *dabtarā* are even said to have wandered about the country as hunters, performing magical services for clients as they go.

(292) *Dabtarā* are not set off from the populace by special insignia. Some wind a turban around their heads, as do many priests; but others may dress like ordinary peasants. If holding more prestigious posts they may be seen with fly-whisks or wearing a *barnos*. But they are known by the people, who fear and respect them. They are feared because of their magical powers, which are believed capable of rendering bullets harmless and turning *injarā* to dust. (554) They are respected because of their learning, for they are the only educated status group in traditional Amhara society. If the commoner's relatively impulsive manner of speaking is contrasted with the quiet reserve of the nobility, his relatively simple language is contrasted with that of the *dabtarā*, who is noted for a studied and circumspect use of language (*qāla-dabtarā*) and for larding his Amharic with literary (i.e., Ge'ez) expressions (*ya-dabtarā amārāññā*).

793 In the case of the religious elite, then, status is in all cases achieved. While there is a natural tendency for sons of priests and *dabtarā* to follow their fathers' example, they arrive at the status in question only by fulfilling the same norms that are applied to the sons of laymen. These norms, however, differ among the different groups within the clergy. Investiture by an authority emanating from the seat of religious charisma, the Alexandrine Patriarchate, and the related ritual requirement of marriage with Communion, were the basis of priestly status, almost irrespective of the personal attainments of the candidate. Personal attainments were *all* that mattered, on the other hand, in the case of monk and *dabtarā*, but they differed radically for the two statuses.

793 The qualifications and characters of monks and *dabtarā* are almost diametrically opposed. The monastic state is entered only by means of a sacred rite; the *dabtarā* is in no way ordained, and might even be a "defrocked" priest. The monk's life is normally given to sensual renunciation; the *dabtarā* is normally an acknowledged sensualist (as appears, for example, in the proverb *ka-mesā ya-talaya dabtarā / yādagāl serā* ["a *dabtarā* who is kept from lunch / will work intrigues"]⁴⁸ and in stories which celebrate the *dabtarā*'s use of his knowledge for private erotic ends). In the monk the virtue

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of ascetic piety is stressed at the expense of knowledge. The monk need not even know how to read, though if a lifelong monk he is likely to have devoted much time to traditional studies. The *dabtarā*, by contrast, lives by his lore and his learning. At his best, the Abyssinian monk conveys a real sense of spiritual purity, of profound mystical bearing, of an utterly mild manner. The *dabtarā*, at his best, is a subtle conversationalist and an operator of wondrous effects.* 793 792 554

Thus, while the status of members of the old nobility was a compound resultant of simultaneously operating criteria—family and region, royal favor and accumulated power—the several criteria relevant to the status of the clergy operated more or less independently. This made the religious elite a more differentiated stratum.

This statement need be qualified only by the fact that, in addition to the considerations of ritual purity, ascetic piety, and traditional learning, a fourth factor influenced the status of the clergy, namely, royal favor as expressed in appointments to the high ecclesiastical offices. This factor crosscut the others, for such favor was dispensed to members of all three status groups. The *eḥagē* was always a monk; the *aqābē sādāt* would seem to have been a *dabtarā*; the post of *alaqā* could be given to members of all three groups.

Just how these types of local clergy were related to the clergy at the national level in the traditional order is a question that is difficult to answer. In any case, it is likely that there were conflicts among their representatives in the competition for royal favor. In the fourteenth century, the ecclesiastics of the royal entourage included only secular clergy, and their deportment was sharply criticized by Eḥagē Fileppos, who charged that "those who live in the dwelling of the Sovereign, go about proudly in subtle raiment and with ornaments of gold and silver—perishables—and are very arrogant."49 However, once Zar'a Yā'qob had established the custom of bringing members of the convent of Dabra Libānos to the court, the monastic order was always well represented in the royal entourage as well. In the present period one sometimes hears of competition among the different groups for influence in 79 175

* The association of impious properties with the main representative of traditional religious learning may be seen as an expression of the Abyssinian's ambivalence toward knowledge as such. The whole tenor of Ethiopian Orthodox religion runs counter to ratiocination and inquiry. It stresses mystery and discourages curiosity with tales like that of the man who tried to probe the mystery of the Trinity and was swallowed up by the earth—a tale commonly told to students who are learning to read. For this reason Orthodox students have frequently been quite upset by the rational theodicy taught by the Jesuit fathers at the University College. 779 793

As observed in the previous chapter, moreover, it was traditionally believed that too much learning results in madness, a belief no doubt based on the fact that older church students often drink a certain medicine to quicken their mental faculties, which sometimes deranges them (as the author has witnessed). The *dabtarā*, for their part, would seem to have thrived on this belief, benefiting from the exclusive powers and privileges gained from their esoteric knowledge.

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79 the contemporary church hierarchy, the *dabtarā* stressing their special intel-
175 lectual qualification for high positions, the monks their greater piety.

The Traditional Balance

121 Whatever the internal fragmentation of the church—which was com-
79 pounded by regionally based doctrinal controversies—it may for the moment
571 be considered as a unified estate vis-à-vis the secular powers. This permits us
to raise the question of the integration of politico-military and religious elites
in traditional Abyssinian society, a question that may be discussed in terms
of two relationships: that between the values represented by the two elites,
and that between the interests of their respective institutions.

799 The social teachings of the Ethiopian Church were couched in terms of
793 practical justice, not universal love. Thus the pacifistic strain in Christianity
182 barely made itself felt. The priests, to be sure, were forbidden to shed blood,
animal or human; but this is more in the nature of a necessity for the main-
tenance of ritual purity than a symbol of moral principle. They went along
willingly to the battlefield in ceremonial capacity. In fact, comments d'Ab-
badie, most of them would reject the interdiction of their taking part in
military expeditions as a denial of their rights.⁴⁰

799 Far from opposing warfare, Ethiopian Christianity served rather as an
721 inspiration and justification for wars; since much of the fighting was directed
571 against Muslim, Judaic, or pagan peoples, the warfare took on something of
182 a crusading tone. As for internecine war, it was commonly justified in terms
of *lex talionis*, a religiously sanctioned punishment for the sins of the enemy.
[681] In this respect, then, the two elites gave impressive support to each other.

The warlords were serving the church by fighting the heathen. The fate of
their military expeditions, on the other hand, was assisted by the prayers of
the accompanying clergy. This reciprocal dependence was symbolized by the
[121] custom of taking some *tābot* along with the army to the battlefield, and by
the custom of "greeting" the church as the first thing a warrior does when
he returns home.

799 The values of warfare and religion were further harmonized by the sym-
721 bolism of the emperor, Lion of Judah. The emperor combined in his person
182 the figures of indomitable warlord and devout—and divinely guided—
643 Christian. This combination was an integral part of the self-image projected
by many emperors, as reflected, for example, in the identification with
Constantine the Great manifested by Zar'a Yā'qob and Eskender (1478-94) in
their choice of throne name, and by Tēwodros II in his coronation speech.

565 With regard to civil policy, moreover, the nobility and clergy were in basic
792 accord. Both groups felt a special responsibility for adjudicating disputes.
793 Both felt that their superior status entitled them to receive substantial
571 amounts of rent and revenues from lands granted them by the king, and to
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175 / *The Old and New Elites*

innumerable gifts and services from the rank and file of the peasantry. Differences normally arose only when the secular powers deviated from what were generally the established norms. Thus, certain extremes of exploitation were on occasion strongly condemned by the clergy—usually the monks—as were certain transgressions of Christian custom by the secular powers, including at times the emperor himself. Amda Tseyon (1314-44), for example, was publicly rebuked, early in his reign, for having seduced one of his father's concubines and two of his own sisters. More generally, the clergy tended to react against flagrant misbehavior on the part of the military—such as looting the homes of those giving them quarter, or violating the right of asylum.

The extent to which the religious and secular powers stood in economic conflict seems to have depended largely on the amount of land available at any given time. Both groups were interested in the acquisition of rights to land revenues. The rights of the church to land are anchored in a traditional agreement, attributed to Yekuno Amläk (1270-85), according to which the church was to receive one-third of the land in the realm. It is clear that the holdings of the church grew progressively larger from that time to the sixteenth century. With the subsequent diminution of Abyssinian territory and related social disorganization, the church's claim to its lands was not so scrupulously respected. Thus, Barradas observed that the emperors of the seventeenth century were as anxious to regain lands from the church for distribution to their soldiers as those of previous centuries had been generous in presenting them, while Takla Häymānot decreed in 1771 that "all lands and villages, which are now or have been given to the Abuna by the King, shall revert to the King's own use."⁸¹ Tēwodros, too, was anxious to recapture as much land as he could from the church. Later in the nineteenth century, however, as Menelik carried out his great territorial expansion, the church systematically acquired one-fourth of all lands in the annexed areas.

In general, it may be said that the clergy and nobility worked to further each other's interests. The nobility supported the clergy by giving endowments to churches and monasteries, setting up churches in newly conquered lands, and observing religious ceremonies as state functions. The clergy, in turn, served secular authority by providing a communications network for relaying and supporting official policies, excommunicating enemies, and providing counsel and morale in connection with military expeditions. Altogether, there was an easy commerce between the two elites. They felt common cause in their responsibilities and privileges vis-à-vis the masses. Occasionally there was even an exchange of personnel, when warlords ended their careers by becoming monks, or clerics acceded to high civil positions, like the Räs of Angot, for example, who in Alvares' time was an ordained priest.

When expectations of mutual support were not satisfied, however, conflict

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- 792 did erupt between the secular and religious powers. In that event both groups
793 had recourse to powerful weapons: the former, violence; the latter, excom-
643 munication. The history of Ethiopia records numerous instances of the flog-
578 ging or execution of clergy by secular authorities. The action of Fasiladas
[175] (1632-67), who reportedly "caused seven thousand priests to be thrown head-
long from the top of the mountain Balbau for having revolted against him,"⁸⁸
would represent but one of the more extreme instances of such violent retri-
bution. Short of violence, the kings at least had other means at their disposal
for controlling the clergy: the power to withhold benefices, the right to
imprison church officials, the final authority on doctrinal questions, and the
ability to block a united front on the part of the clergy by pitting high
church officials against each other.

792 On the other hand, infringement on the rights of churches and monasteries,
793 gross civil injustice, or radical departure from religious tradition could on
578 occasion evoke surprisingly effective retaliation by the clergy. D'Abbadie
provides some extremely illuminating passages on this matter, from which
the following have been extracted:

More than once have I been present at debates of this nature; I have seen these
men of the church, weak and without arms amidst men of war, pleading
in the name of the law, indicting the menacing covetousness of the sur-
rounding soldiery, invoking eloquently reprobation against their powerful
adversaries, and leading them to disavow themselves that force which con-
stituted their pride. . . .

In the case of an open violation of an asylum, the regular clergy got
aroused; the most venerable monks abandoned their solitude, assembled the
parish clergy, went into the camps, and generally they obtained justice.
When the real culprit was the Dajāzmāčh, they brought him to repentance,
or else excommunicated him, threatened his servants with anathema if they
continued to serve him, put the province under interdict and, aided by the
monks of the neighboring provinces, stirred up national reprobation against
him.⁸⁹

- 792 The clergy had other resources which it could employ against the emperor
793 himself. It could influence royal policy through highly placed advisers.
578 Through the *abuna* it could exact certain promises from a prospective em-
643 peror as a condition of coronation. Perhaps most important, the clergy could,
through its hold over public opinion, turn the populace against the sov-
ereign. As we have seen, this power proved decisive in the encounters be-
tween church and monarch in the reigns of Za Dengel and Suaneyos, and
contributed significantly to the downfall of Tēwodros and Lijj Iyāsu.

643 While therefore the emperor may well have been "supreme in all causes,
792 ecclesiastical and civil," he was far from being the sole, or even the decisive,
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source of the influence enjoyed by the clergy. The latter constituted a largely autonomous status group which no emperor could afford to antagonize indefinitely. The attempt to build a more powerful central government and introduce cultural reforms thus required some alteration of their independent status as well as that of the old nobility.

THE FEUDAL ORDER IN TRANSITION

The Decline of the Old Nobility

It must always have been the policy of the Ethiopian emperors, except for those few who did not relish the political side of their office, to seek to maximize their control over the regional nobility. They did this, we have seen, either by granting land, power, and rank to men who were completely dependent on them, or else by controlling, through military and diplomatic means, those lords whose birthright and regional strength gave them strong claims to their positions.

During the past century, however, the idea of subordinating regional nobles to imperial control has come to be conceived more radically and has become the core of a slowly emerging ideal of a modern nation-state. Some such vision was certainly behind the tortuous career of Tēwodros II, whose policy was a reaction against the desperate disunity which the Age of the Princes brought to Abyssinia and to the growing threat from foreign powers. In Plowden's official report to the British government in 1855, he described Tēwodros' work as follows:

The arduous task of breaking the power of the great feudal chiefs—a task achieved in Europe only during the reigns of many consecutive kings—he has commenced by chaining almost all who were dangerous, avowing his intention of liberating them when his power shall be consolidated. He has placed soldiers of the different provinces under the command of his own trusty followers, to whom he has given high titles, but no power to judge or punish: thus, in fact, creating generals in place of feudal chieftains, more proud of their birth than of their monarch, and organising a new nobility—a legion of honour dependent on himself, and chosen specially for their daring and fidelity.⁸⁴

The task of displacing the great feudal chiefs proved to be scarcely less arduous in Ethiopia than in Europe, however. Tēwodros' high hopes were shattered against the opposing forces of regional ambitions and clerical disaffection. The national unity he won through conquest and reform did not survive to the end of his reign.

Yohānnes IV (1871-89) likewise aimed at uniting the nation, but was distracted from serious internal reform by the need to fight off the encroach-

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"subject to the approval of the Emperor" and gave him "the right to promulgate the decrees, edicts, and public regulations of the Church, except those concerning monastic life and other spiritual administrations."

The general position of the church had already been weakened by the events of the Italian occupation. Italian policy resulted in the destruction of many church buildings and the massacre of numerous monks, including those of the hallowed monastery of Dabra Libānos. Of the national leaders, the Egyptian *abuna* was out of the country from 1937 on; two of the bishops were put to death, including the much venerated martyr, Abuna Pētros;* and the remaining two compounded the demoralization by openly supporting the invaders. One of these went so far as to anathematize resistance fighters and forbade Ethiopian priests to give Christian burial to those who died as patriots. In some areas, moreover, it is said that the local clergy lost much prestige by welcoming the invader with open arms.

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Haile Selassie thus had a much stronger hand in his dealings with the clergy when he returned from exile in 1941. The next year he issued a decree which sharply restricted the perquisites of the local clergy. Their landed properties were no longer tax free, but now carried the obligation to pay taxes at the normal rate into a central church treasury. The church was deprived of temporal jurisdiction over its ordained and lay members, including the authority to inflict fines, and was denied the right to corvée labor from peasants living on their lands. (In practice these latter restrictions of authority are frequently ignored in the provinces.)

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The development of a nationwide system of government schools, finally, has broken the clergy's monopoly of educational facilities. Wherever government schools have invaded traditional Abyssinian regions, the clergy tend to be defensive and resentful. The specific issues have been the decreased prestige of certain traditional religious subjects, which are not taught in these schools, and the comparatively lower income of church teachers. Thus, a full-time teacher of reading attached to a monastery may receive Eth\$15 a month from the central church treasury, whereas a government school teacher in the same area teaching the same subject may earn Eth\$150 a month.

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Despite all these blows, the clergy still retain much the same prestige as ever in the provinces. Their influence over public opinion is considerable, and has been a major factor in discouraging families in traditional Christian areas like Manz from sending their children to government schools.† Despite

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* A statue of Abuna Pētros has been raised in the center of Addis Ababa. His fate has been celebrated in the verse drama by Makonnen Endäklēchaw, *Ya-dam Demts*, translated into English as *The Voice of Blood* by Endäklēchaw Makonnen.

† When the Ethiopian government is ready to inaugurate a major program of provincial education, it should not prove difficult to overcome this opposition. A number of provincial priests, with whom the author has discussed this matter, have signified their willingness to serve as

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



FIG. 30.—A widower who has become a monk



FIG. 31.—A group of clergy

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261 / Individualism and Social Progress

are balanced by a fairly permissive mode of organization. For the clergy, the constraints are heavier; the fasting requirements are increased, and the priesthood involves, as we have seen, strict marital fidelity. On the other hand, the individualistic organization of the clergy is most striking. 121* 793 795

This individualism is conspicuous already in the church schools, which are organized not on a class basis but in a series of master-pupil relations. Students begin their courses of study whenever they arrive at the residence of the master, and proceed each at his own pace. The master spends the bulk of his time with more advanced students, who in turn are used to instruct the less advanced. The pupils are very much on their own, uncontrolled either by their families, with whom they no longer reside, nor by any formal institution. The same is true of the masters, who are not subjected to any sort of outside controls. Indeed, each teacher tends to develop his own unique method of teaching, regarding it as something of a personal monopoly.²⁴ 121* 795 87

The ministrating clergy are likewise free from controls emanating from a broad ecclesiastical organization. Each parish church functions autonomously under the direction of a head (*alaqā*) chosen by the local clergy. (Heads of the most important churches have traditionally been appointed by the emperor.) The obligations of the priesthood are not very great. The chief duty of the priest is to take his turn in performing the Mass. His pastoral services are limited to occasional visits with his particular confessants, from whom he expects to receive regular rewards of food and drink. Otherwise, his life is much the same as that of his lay neighbors. 121* 793 795

The role of the *dabtarā*, as we have seen, is still more flexible. *Dabtarā* who are associated with a parish church are expected to take their turns singing hymns and composing *qenē* in the outer ring of the church; but otherwise they exist as free entrepreneurs, and they need not be so attached unless they so desire.

The individualistic organization of the Ethiopian Church is most striking, perhaps, in the case of the monks, especially when compared with Christian monastic orders in the Western world. Ethiopian monks are bound by nothing other than the original conditions for assuming the role, namely, renouncing family ties and worldly possessions. The monk need not enter a monastery; he may continue to live in his old home or may take to the woods as a hermit. If he does go to live at a monastery, his life is not radically changed. The Ethiopian monastery is not an organized community, but a sacred place—the site of a large and important church, in the vicinity of which live numbers of individual monks. The monk comes and goes as he wishes, prays whenever he wants, and may live free of any obligations toward his fellow monastics and toward the rest of the society.* 121* 792 795

* There are, however, some monasteries where a more organized and disciplined regime may be found.

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ecclesiastical education for their sons.

However, it is not only the cripple and blind, or the landless sons of full-time ecclesiastics who find in the parish school the means to leave the agricultural community. In reality, they constitute only a minority of the boys who leave the parish. For among those who are the physically-whole offspring of risteñas, there are some who find objectionable the prospect of a life-time as a farmer, subordinated to a father's wishes and interests, and bound to a single woman. Where such inchoate dissatisfaction exists, it may be further stimulated by the parish teacher, particularly if he is a debtera.

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The teaching at the parish school is performed by a local priest or monk²² who is competent in the required subjects. In the absence of a suitable local man, a stranger monk or debtera is employed. The debtera is a Church scholar of sorts, who also leads the chanting of the liturgy during the performance of the Mass. He is an important model for the restive student, for his life provides an alternative and challenge to the social

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²²A "monk" (manakwosa) is a mature unmarried deacon, a widowed priest, or a layman who has renounced material acquisitions and has vowed celibacy. Only the first two are literate and, therefore, potential teachers. There are, in addition, anchorites (bahatahwy).

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*787 By mid-way in a debtera's career, the capabilities of

*793 his abinet repertoire are sufficient to make the continued assistance of ganel familiars largely redundant.

The loss of familiars does not affect the abinet powers which the debtera already holds. Most have been obtained without ganel complicity and do not rely on ganels for their effectiveness; others (kifat works) invoke ganels mechanically and do not require their good will; last, the abinet information already gained from ganels is unaffected by the loss of the daemons. The dissolution of this bond brings no special dangers; it instigates no retribution by the familiar, nor does it increase the debtera's vulnerability to ganel assaults. Finally, by utilizing his abinet repertoire to simulate ganel associations, the debtera is able to prevent public disclosure of the loss of real ties.

Moral Content of Debtera-Ganel Bond. The acquisition of ganel familiars represents an important technical discontinuity in a man's abinet career, since a purposively induced hallucinatory state is experienced in no other abinet work. In other contexts, ganels are also directly encountered, particularly by monks, but in no other encounter are preparations made beforehand for restraining the ganel once he appears, or for obtaining desired services from him during the meeting.

Morally, the discontinuity is not so great, at least

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*787 from the debtera's perspective. Beginning with simple

*793 herbal remedies and ending with ganel pulling, the

awakiy debtera's moral compromises are gradual and continuous. Although ganel pulling represents his only direct contact with demon helpers, his previous and continuing kifat performances make the debtera no stranger to the casuistry of ganel complicity. Beyond this, however, there is an important moral unity to the debtera's abinet works, whether they are produced by the power of divine beings or ganele. An abinet career is founded on a debtera's readiness to conceive of supernaturally derived power as a morally neutral commodity. As he exploits such power, he is constrained less by its intrinsic moral character than by its instrumental limitations. The debtera's accomplishment is to transmute the moral nature of the power he depends upon for his works. This he does by exerting his will over it, and directing it onto the objects and contingencies that he has selected.

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Inviolability of Divine Power: The Atmakiy. The goodness (moges) of divine power is unblemished and its enjoyment is determined by divine will (yi'Igziyabiher yimozgin). The attitude of the pious man towards this will is supplicatory; towards this power, he is a passive recipient and a disinterested custodian. In a medical context, the atmakiy is exemplary. The atmakiy

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("baptizer") is a priest or monk who provides sanctified healing waters for sickmen. By reading from appropriate liturgical texts, any literate ecclesiastic can sanctify ordinary water drawn from a river, or the water of a spring (tebel) known to have divine curing powers. Sanctified common water is generally dispensed in the courtyard of a church, by a resident cleric serving as atmakiy for the occasion. No atmakiy has exclusive rights to the tebel at which he works, since he is only the representative of the church or monastery in whose parish the tebel is located. An atmakiy provides no medical services beyond dispensing sanctified water or overseeing the tebel. According to the atmakiy, as the sickman bathes, the divine fires of the water repel the ganels responsible for his ailment. The layman, however, does not conceive the effectiveness of these waters so narrowly, but sees them as the medium for a divine grace (moges) unbounded by specific etiological notions. Consequently, although sanctified waters are used most commonly against madness (ibidet) and epilepsy (ganel yazow), both caused by ganels, they are also applied against serious, chronic ailments with which ganels are not generally associated (e.g., leprosy). Usually the sickman turns to sanctified waters as a last resort, after he has exhausted all other therapies he can afford. A sickman continues to bathe with the waters of a single church or tebel, until he has

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* 793 tions of awdunigist).

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* [792] The destructive power of ganels is the shadow of di-
vine grace. Although the goodness of divine power is
perfect, divine intentions are realized through the pro-
mise of sanctions (mekseft), as well as grace. The
ganels are utilized for the operation of these sanctions.
* [792] Christians are each protected by a pair of angel guar-
dians (maliket), in the command of the Almighty. Divine
displeasure is expressed by removing these guardians from
the principal or his children.⁴⁰ Once a breach is opened,
ganels are certain to attack, for they pursue their des-
tructive goals indiscriminately, striking where oppor-
tunity, rather than special interest beckons.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Not all cases of ganel assaults can be traced to
divine motives, however. Occasionally, ganels are able
to outwit or overwhelm an individual's angel guardians,
particularly when a debtera forces them to attack a vul-
nerable target. The precise balance between a man's
assets (guardian angels, kitab protectors) and deficits
(vulnerabilities indicated by awdunigist, ganel sabiy
influence on ganels) is never a matter of speculation
in specific episodes, however.

• [792] ⁴¹ Generally, very holy monks, in lives of seclusion
and prayer given over entirely to the Almighty, are
singled out by ganels, for physical assaults and tempta-
tions of the flesh.